DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 289 CS 004 497

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TITLE A Model for Faculty In-Service in the Secondary Reading Program.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (23rd, Houston, Texas, May 1-5, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Content Reading; *Faculty Development; *Group Discussion; Group Dynamics; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Problem Solving; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; Secondary School Teachers; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

The Structured Discussion Approach (SDA) is a continuing inservice program in which faculty members mutually decide upon and attempt to solve common instructional problems. The five steps in the SDA are: identify the major instructional problems felt by the faculty, discuss with the faculty the framework behind the SDA, prepare for the outside reading phase of the SDA, begin with a trial procedure on topic one, and evaluate the process and understandings gained. The SDA allows faculties to develop independence and expertise in identifying and solving problems together. (TJ)

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A MODEL FOR FACULTY IN-SERVICE IN THE SECONDARY READING PROGRAM

George M. Usova

The issue of developing effective in-service education within the secondary reading program is a concern for most curriculum supervisors and principals. While the reading program in the secondary school may be limited or partial in scope, the consequences of effective reading instruction extends into the content areas; consequently, all teachers need to become involved for the improvement of instruction in as far as reading affects their discipline.

All too frequently the mention of in-service evokes a negative reaction from most secondary teachers. This aversive reaction is easily understood when considering the usual procedures of in-service that have been and still are employed in most schools.

Initially, it must be pointed out that the primary objective of in-service education is for the improvement of instruction. To be certain, in-service must meet the instructional needs of the faculty, and it must be an on-going process.

Why then do most in-service programs fail in achieving their purposes. There are, of course, a variety of reasons which may include the following practices:

1. The central office decides the instructional needs of the teachers without teacher input.
2. A university specialist is hired as a consultant who delivers a half-day or day long speech which is meaningless to most teachers.
3. In-service is held at unsuitable times, i.e. release time is not provided, sessions are too long or too short.
4. Faculty meetings are called without advance notice or planned agendas; too often trivia is discussed that might be settled by memo.

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5. Instructional problems are beyond completion in the time allotted.
6. In-service education is relegated to three days before the opening of school and several teacher workshop days throughout the year.

The list of malpractices might go on. The overall central issue for sound in-service is effective leadership. Effective leadership may be assumed by any educator, but typically, it is assumed by the building principal or the curriculum supervisor. The support and leadership of the principal is essential for the success of the reading program, or for that matter, any program (Usova, 1976).

The most fruitful and beneficial form of on-going in-service must take place at the building level. It is here where instructional concerns are unique and a commonality of goals can be established. The principal must be involved with the teachers to lend support and direction. The reading consultant or supervisor, too, must be involved initially to establish the format for the Structured Discussion Approach, which is a structured framework designed to enlist faculty support and enthusiasm for sharing information and solving instructional problems.

The Structured Discussion Approach may be defined as an on-going in-service program where faculty members mutually decide upon and attempt to solve common instructional problems.

The S.D.A. follows a sequential five-step procedure which may be implemented by any faculty member familiar with the process. Typically, it is initiated by an educator in a leadership role -- the principal, supervisor, or consultant; however, once implemented, the leadership roles may be assigned to the faculty members, either on a permanent or rotational basis.

The procedural steps of the S.D.A. are as follows:

Step 1

Identify the major instructional problems felt by the faculty. Faculty,

depending upon purpose, may include the entire building faculty, content teachers and reading teachers, specific grade levels teachers, or any combination of the above. The concerns of the faculty may be solicited in a number of ways, but it is critical to the process to receive their concerns in writing. An open or structured questionnaire distributed to each faculty member can easily accomplish this purpose.

After the questionnaires are collected, the supervisor must tally the most frequently mentioned concerns, refine them into meaningful language, and rank them in order of priority. The list of concerns should contain 8-10 of the most critical problem areas; this list will therefore serve as the basis for monthly faculty meetings throughout the year.

An example of such a list appears below as a simulation.

> At our first faculty meeting, the faculty of secondary reading specialists and content-area teachers identified major problem areas which were interfering with the reading-instructional process. While the problem areas were solicited individually, there was certainly a commonality of concerns for all teachers. In order of frequency, the following problem areas were identified:
>
> 1. How can the principal become involved in the reading program?
> 2. How can secondary students be motivated to read?
> 3. How can reading skills be simultaneously taught within content areas?
> 4. What methods of grouping can be used in the classroom?
> 5. What are the materials available for teaching secondary remedial readers?
> 6. How can the personal problems and frustrations of students' inability to cope with reading/learning be overcome?
> 7. How can secondary reading problems be diagnosed effectively?
> 8. What are the "survival skills" and how should they be taught?

The beautiful aspect of presenting such a list is that the problems identified are those of the faculty. It is the faculty's list which allows them to feel committed to solving the problems.

Step 2

Discuss with the faculty the framework behind the S.D.A. The S.D.A. is a technique where a group of teachers attempt to solve an instructional problem

primarily through the sharing of information. An agenda is prepared to guide the participants in the resolution of a designated problem. The agenda is prepared to allow participants an opportunity to prepare information to bring to the discussion. For a discussion to be fruitful and to be a learning experience, it is important for each member to be prepared to provide new information to the discussion; otherwise, the discussion becomes a sharing of ignorance.

Each discussion group or topical problem area must have the following roles assigned: leader, consultant, observer, recorder, and group members. Furthermore, each role must enact definite responsibilities.

Leader. The leader is usually elected by the group because of his/her knowledge of a topic or because of intrinsic leadership characteristics. (Initially, however, the leader would be the reading supervisor or principal who will acquaint the faculty to the S.D.A. process.) The roles that the leader plays are many and varied; however, to highlight the more important ones, the leader is responsible for (1) preparing the agenda, (2) keeping the topic in focus, (3) encouraging the group to make decisions, (4) avoiding the answering of questions, i.e. not in a "teaching-telling" role and (5) bringing the group to a consensus. In essence, the leader leads the group toward problem solving action through a democratic approach.

Consultant. The consultant is usually a member of the faculty (although he/she may be an invited member from outside the building) who assumes the role of having additional information above and beyond the members of the group. The consultant (1) offers added research information when necessary (2) clarifies areas of confusion and (3) avoids dominating the discussion through "teaching-telling." In essence, the consultant is a resource person who provides valuable and pertinent information when necessary.

Observer. The observer is a member of the faculty whose primary goal is that of process observer. The observer pays secondary attention to the content

of the discussion and primary attention to the how and why of the group's progress. Specifically, the observer (1) clarifies where bog-downs in the discussion occur, (2) does not allow the group to stray upon hidden agendas and (3) keeps the group on the designated time limits. In summary, the observer is concerned with preventing problems that arise in the process of the discussion.

Recorder. Every faculty discussion must have a recorder who writes, without editing, the contributions of the group members. The recorder may be called upon by any member of the group to summarize points made along the way of the discussion. While the recorder may be a participant, his/her primary goal is to write and report to the group. It is additionally important that the recorder summarize in writing the accomplishments made by the group; the written summation gives the group a sense of tangible production and achievement.

Group Members. The members of the group involve everyone in the discussion process. Briefly, each member is responsible to be prepared for the discussion, to contribute, and to ask questions on unclear points. Essentially, the participation of the group members are the central core of the discussion.

Step 3

Prepare for the outside reading phase of the S.D.A. Now that the faculty have been given a list of their problems (Step 1) and have been shown the framework of how the S.D.A. operates (Step 2), they are ready to begin reading upon the topic of their first concern.

The supervisor or principal must now take the topics and prepare a library of readings relative to the topics. These readings are the basis for faculty growth in the solving of their instructional problems. The best place for establishing a professional library may be either in the teacher's lounge or the library. After the location is decided and given the first two topics as an example, the following sources may be made available to the faculty for pre-

paration for the respective topics:

Topic 1: How can the principal become involved in the reading program?

Fitzgerald, Increasing Communication Between Administrators and Reading Personnel. Reading Horizons, Fall 1977, 19-22.
Usova, High School Reading Failures: Problems and Concerns. Reading Improvement, Winter, 1976, 251-254.
Trubowitz, The Principal Helps Improve Reading Instruction. Reading Horizons, Spring, 1978, 186-189.
Usova, Avoiding Dangers in the Secondary Reading Program: The Principal's Role. Reading Horizons, Spring, 1978, 186-189.

Topic 2: How can secondary students be motivated to read?

Allington, If They Don't Read Much, How They Ever Gonna Get Good? J. of Reading, October, 1977, 57-61.
Gentile, Why Won't Teenagers Read? J. of Reading, May, 1977, 649-653.
McIntyre, Survival Kits for Stragglers. J. of Reading, May, 1977, 661-668.
Criscuolo, Convincing the Unconvinced to Read: Twelve Strategies, J. of Reading, Dec., 1977, 219-226.
Haimowitz, Motivating Reluctant Readers in Inner-City Classes, J. of Reading, Dec., 1977, 227-230.
Usova, Techniques for Motivating Interest in Reading for the Disadvantaged H.S. Student, Reading Improvement, Spring, 1978, 36-38.

In addition to providing the above sources, the suggested agendas below should be given the faculty members involved to guide their reading. The suggested time allotted for each item is indicated parenthetically.

Topic 1: How can the principal become involved in the reading program?

(5) What types of reading programs are there? Describe them.
(10) What people are responsible for program development and operation of the program?
(15) Role-playing situation.
(20) What are the roles of the following in a remedial program:
Principal
Reading teacher
Content teacher
(10) What are their roles in the "reading in the content areas" program?
(10) How can the principal become more knowledgable about reading?
(10) What general guidelines should be made in developing a program?

Topic 2: How can secondary students be motivated to read?

(10) What are the values in reading?
(20) Why do students avoid reading?
(5) What effect does the teacher have upon negative attitudes toward reading?
(25) What specific techniques can be used to motivate student reading?

Sufficient time should be given to the faculty members to prepare themselves for the scheduled discussion -- no less than two weeks.

At this point, too, the Supervisor may wish to identify a Consultant, Observer, and Recorder to the discussion.

Step 4

Trial procedure of the S.D.A. upon Topic 1. Since the date and time for the first S.D.A. faculty meeting would have been established in advance, all faculty members involved will have had ample opportunity to prepare. The ideal rationale behind the preparation issue is that the faculty members themselves are reading upon their identified problems. This creates in their minds a commonality of goals, a mutual problem, an espirit de corps. The topic was not imposed but rather one that involved everyone's input.

The discussion should progress as per agenda with the leadership roles assigned. Usually 1-1½ hours of time are needed for immersion into the topic. Tuesdays or Wednesdays appear to be the better days for holding faculty meetings (McHugh, 1972). This meeting should be relaxed and informal but coupled with a business-like atmosphere.

Step 5

Evaluate the process and understandings gained. After the discussion has ended, time should be allotted for a review of the process and an overall evaluation. The observer might be asked to respond first. The leader should attempt to elicit responses from the group members as to how they felt the meeting progressed. The two important criteria for evaluation are (1) was progress on the topic made? and, (2) were understandings gained in the discussion applicable to the program's improvement in terms of direct classroom implementation or overall program development?

The evaluation process is a healthy one which provides a foundation for

improvement in the subsequent S.D.A. meetings scheduled throughout the remainder of the year. At times, during meetings, the group may determine other problems not covered in the agenda. Further study and exploration may be needed. Sub-groups might develop to study these areas. Perhaps, too, the assigned topic may not have been adequately covered to the satisfaction of the group members. In these cases, it is necessary to either form subcommittees or continue upon the same topic at the next meeting. The key term here is flexibility in that the group decides whether they are satisfied or not. The group makes the decisions based upon the two criteria mentioned above.

The S.D.A. has many advantages for curing the negative reactions associated with in-service education. The approach is ideally adapted for the building level in-service but can easily be modified for the district level; the processes are the same.

The values are as follows: the faculty determines their own problems democratically, they solve their problems through outside reading and research, and they grow professionally as they become independent in determining and solving their own problems.

The Supervisor or Principal leads them through the approach several times until the faculty itself can elect its own emergent leaders. The Supervisor then may "fade gradually from the picture" allowing the faculty to work independently. The Supervisor may, from time to time, serve as a Consultant or Observer to the process. The faculty, however, is achieving independence to progress on its own.

The S.D.A. does not necessarily eliminate the expertise provided from outside consultants where necessary; it does, however, provide a framework for on-going productive in-service where the faculty has the opportunity to enhance their professional knowledge and growth to instructional problems of immediate concern.

REFERENCES

McHugh, Walter. "Stimulating Professional Staff Development" in Administrators and Reading (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), p. 178.

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